1: Allen H-4 (no date) 1932 RI1 Georgia RI1

[Medieval Georgia]

THE MIDDLE AND LOWER CLASSES

Vadcharni—the merchants—constituted a separate social class, as is evident from the *sigelni* (charters) of the Catholicos Melkisedeki,[1] dating from the year 1020, wherein they are mentioned for the first time. The earlier literary sources preserve very little information about them, from which it is to be deduced that in the remoter times the merchants commanded little or no influence in the political life of the country. From the eleventh century they are, however, comparatively frequently mentioned.

The merchants were divided into two main groups—*did-vadcharni*, the great merchants, and *vadcharni*, the merchants. The great merchants participated in the affairs of state; the King not infrequently appointed ambassadors from among them, and they were sometimes accorded civil appointments. Some public prosecutors, for instance, were from the merchant class.

The group of *vadcharni* was of course more numerous, and their position differed greatly from that of the "great merchants". While the latter were free and participated in the political life of the country, the former included many who were not free, being the slaves of others, and they could be bought and sold like the ordinary serfs.[2]

The merchants possessed their own organizations and associations and were under a *Vadchart-Ukhutsesi*[3]—the Chief of the Merchants. Unfortunately, however, no indication has been preserved as to whether he was elected by the merchants themselves or was appointed by the King. *The Man in the Panther's Skin* indicates the fact that the merchants wore a distinctive dress or uniform of their own.[4]

The Georgian literary sources give very little information about the position of the artisans, and it is rather difficult to state whether socially they formed a social group such as the *msakhurni* or the peasant class. From the work of Abuseridze Tbeli we can glean that in the twelfth century —and it may be inferred that even earlier—there existed in Georgia artisans who maintained themselves and their families by their labour and that they were free; for they seem to have been able to move freely about the country and even to go abroad to gain their livelihood.

The word *qma* or *qrma* in the sense of serf or slave is first

[1] See Th. Jordania, *Kronikebi da Skhva Masalebi Sakartvelos Istoriisa* (*The Chronicles and other Materials of Georgian History*), II, 33.
[2] See Jordania, *Ibid.*, II, 33.
[3] See *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, by Sh. Rusthaveli, English Edition by M. Wardrop.
[4] *Ibid.* See Quatrain 1058.

1: Allen H-4 (no date) 1932 RI1 Georgia RI1

[Historical and Medieval Georgia]

clear that an *eristavi* was the ruler and master of the land and the inhabitants of his *saeristao*; to him were subject not only the peasants but also the *aznaurni* and even the churches—the latter, however, only in so far as their relationship with the civil government was concerned.

The *eristavi* wore a particular dress which was exactly like that worn by Justinian, the Byzantine Emperor; by way of distinction he also wore "a ring and a belt"; besides "he had a banner, a horse (of particular breed) and a spear".

The *eristavt-eristavi* had authority over all *didebulni* and *aznaurni* domiciled in his *saeristavt-eristao*. Thus there was this difference between the *eristavt-eristavi* and the *eristavi*, that *didebulni*, "the great", were subject to the former and not to the latter; after the King, the *didebulni* obeyed the *eristavt-eristavi*.

In military matters, and especially during war, the *eristavt-eristavi* held supreme authority; every *didebuli* and *aznauri* and all the other inhabitants of his province had to follow his banner. *Mtavarni* and *eristavt-eristavni* wielded great power and influence; materially also they were very wealthy. Some of them were so powerful that they vied with the King and often openly opposed themselves to the royal power. At the royal receptions an *eristavt-eristavi* had this privilege, that his personal Grand Treasurer stood behind his seat with a shield and sword.

One of the functions of an *eristavt-eristavi* was the supervision of justice at the peasants' court of law; the actual dispensation of justice was entrusted to his *saeristavt-eristao mamasakhlisi*. Ecclesiastical peasants, however, were excluded from his jurisdiction.

For the benefit of an *eristavi* a special tax called *saeristavoi gamosavali* ("the eristavi's due") was collected annually. In addition to these usual and permanent dues he also received a tribute which was collected periodically. For the supervision of the peasants' court of justice he received a fixed portion of the fines imposed by the courts, which was called *kerdzi saeristavoi* ("the eristavi's portion"). When these concerned thefts this eristavi's portion appears to have amounted to one-seventh.

An *eristavt-eristavi* had a great many subordinate officials, including *temis-eristavni* (eristavni of districts); his own *mdsignobart-ukhutsesi* ("grand secretary") and *molaret-ukhutsesi* ("grand treasurer") and numerous *msakhurni*. He also had

1: Allen H-4 (no date) 1932 RI1 Georgia RI1

are told by Mishetski that "*King Taymurazi and his heir are much loved by the people . . . . the princes and the aznaurs guard the King's life zealously. . . . The people in the land are kind-hearted*".[1] The human mind works in a mysterious way. It does still.

The Court of Alexander was a more splendid affair than that of his exiled guest. We are fortunate in that Tolochanov had left us an intimate description of it, and Castelli has made two excellent drawings of the King. The Imerian ruler was about forty years of age when Castelli drew his picture, and he had reigned in Kutais for twelve years at the time of the visit of the Russian Mission. His figure had coarsened from heavy living; his expression is arrogant and lecherous, yet not without a certain shrewdness in it. He had been twelve years married to his second wife—Taymurazi's daughter,[2] and he showed himself during his chequered and not unsuccessful reign, a strange mixture of ruthlessness and generosity, of brutality and kindliness.

When Tolochanov saw the King in audience, he wore his state regalia in which he has been depicted by Castelli —a crown "beautifully set with pearls and precious stones" and surmounted by a cross studded with diamonds, rubies and emeralds; in his hand a sceptre inlaid with gold and mounted with precious stones with inset in its apple a stone with the Christ carved thereon. He wore a mantle of sable and velvet embroidered in gold and underneath a caftan of watered silk stitched with gold thread and bordered with gold lace. Castelli's picture, which answers in detail to Tolochanov's description, shows the King with the long locks fashionable in contemporary Christendom, and he has the heavy sweeping moustaches which were the mode in the East right down to the last century. In Castelli's picture he has not shaved for some days. Tolochanov observed that behind and above the King's head triptyches had been placed, and at his right hand was another sceptre, surmounted by a miniature shrine. The shrine was crowned by a cross in gold, inlaid with precious stones which were rather large in size. Yet another sceptre, of similar design, was placed on his left, and against a pillar, in front of the King, was propped one more of exactly the same kind. The Catholicos of Abkhazeti sat on Alexander's right, and next to him was

[1] Polievktov, *Mishetski's Mission*, p. 160.

[2] Nestan-Darejani, who, after Alexander's death, caused the new King, Bagrati, her step-son, to be blinded when he was only sixteen years of age. Her intrigues, her amours, and her horrid death are described in detail by Chardin.

6: Grigolia E-4, 5 (no date) 1939 RI1 Georgia RI1
Chevsur

ning of this chapter, religion with the Georgian Highlanders held a sustaining and regulating place in the life of the community. The various and numerous religious rules were observed and executed without any hesitation.

In the celebration of holidays in the leading sanctuaries, not only the natives but their neighbors (even the Mohammedans) take part. Thus, at the festival of the *Lashris-jvari,* at the end of July, known as *lashroba,* or *Lashris-jvaroba,* there are present, besides the Pshavs, Tushes, Khevsurs, Mahommedan Kists, Georgians from Kartli and Kakleti, and others. This fact was observed by the French investigator, Baron de Baye,[41] during the religious celebrations in the monastery of Alaverdi in Kakhetia. The religious festivals in the cathedral of Alaverdi are described in detail by A. L. Zisserman.[42]

The Khevsurs come to these festivals wearing their best clothes and arms, and bring animals for sacrifice. Visitors who have given a special vow to the *Khati* are bare-footed and wear over their garments long white shirts which they take off at the entrance to the enclosure of the sanctuary and throw into a pit especially dug for this purpose. A great number of animals is sacrificed to the *Khati*—hundreds of sheep, goats and oxen are killed. Baron de Baye relates that 750 sheep and two oxen were sacrificed at the celebration in the monastery of Alaverdi in Kakhatia, and that the celebration in the Khevsur sanctuary, *Khakhmatis-jvari,* required the sacrifice of from 500 to 600 sheep and twenty to forty oxen. The blood of the animals is caught in a special wooden vessel. The *dekanozi* who butchers the animals washes his hands in the blood and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the offerer. The pelt and fore part of the animal belong to the *dekanozi* and the hind part to the offerer, who forwards it to the attendants of the *Khati* to use as supply for the general feast which follows the religious ceremonies.

Besides saying prayers and killing the sacrificial animals during religious holidays, the *dekanozis*[1] also hear complaints of various kinds and settle disputes, according to established custom.

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[41] Baye: a, 253.
[42] Zisserman: 23-4.

[1] D.g. shrine attendants; see cat. 116, p. 21 ff., esp. p. 29--Analyst]

C. G. 291 is used sparingly and limited to patterns in white on shoes and boots, and silver mountings on the belt. The Pshav have adopted Georgian attire.

C. G. 411 Not only is the Caucasian sober in the use of embellishments on his clothing, which is in itself quite elegant; he also does not wear any ornaments or trinkets. His esthetic sense finds an outlet in the decoration of his arms, however. The sheaths and hilts of daggers and sabers and the grips of pistols were often made of gold or silver, and adorned with precious stones or with niello-work (the latter also on the barrels). The Caucasian dagger--considered as important a part of the attire as is a tie in the West--has a straight, broad, double-edged blade with a groove (blood trough) running down the middle. Formerly, the armature consisted of one or two pistols, tucked behind the belt, a rifle, which the mountaineers always carried in a cover, and a saber. On the belt, various accessories (powderhorn, C. G. grease container, flint, etc.) were worn. Only [713] the Khevsur preserved until quite recently full medieval armor: helmets, coats of mail, shields, swords, clubs and toothed thumb-C. G. rings. The armor was worn on festive occa-• [292] sions and also whenever a man might expect to be attacked because he was involved in a blood-feud, which was usually the case.

C. G. 291 The costume of the Caucasian women shows much more local variation than that of